

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services:

Opening the Door to Ability

“Ability is of little account without opportunity.”

—Napoleon Bonaparte



Missy Masterson was able to move on to a new career opportunity when she was diagnosed with a disability. Freddie Smith congratulates her on being named ARS Rehabilitant of the Year.

As a registered nurse working at St. Joseph's Mercy Health Center in Hot Springs, Missy Masterson epitomized ability every day. Then she was diagnosed with osteopenia plantar fasciitis, a bone loss that made continuing her job as a floor nurse impossible.

With that diagnosis, Missy became one of the 285,000 Arkansans of working age, 16-64, who must live with some disability. Unfortunately, more than half of these Arkansans with a disability are not employed. Their unemployment is not by choice as the vast majority is willing, able, and wanting to work for a living, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Commissioner Robert P. Treviño says.

Not wanting to be another statistic, Missy turned to the ARS field office in Hot Springs for help. “Missy was naturally feeling some depression when she came to us, having so much education and training that she was now unable to use, and she had her family to consider as well,” Nina Webb, a counselor at the Hot Springs office, says.

The ARS team got to work to find opportunities for Missy. Medical personnel recommended shoe inserts to help ease the pain, and Phyllis Barrett began looking for a new way for Missy to put her skills to work.

“Our first job when we start the process of putting our clients back to work is to look at their transferable skills,” Nina says. “Since Missy had already experienced the duties of being a nurse, she knew the procedures required, and we just wanted to find her something where she could use this knowledge but [it] wouldn't . . . require her to be on her feet so much.”

A few weeks after the job search began, Nina says, “it was like everything just fell into place and a Higher Power stepped in.” The Area Agency on Aging was looking for a new director. Missy switched the focus of her resume from nursing to administration, applied, and was hired.

In accepting the ARS Rehabilitant of the Year Award earlier this year, Missy said her new job is the best she's ever had. She is grateful for the opportunity to put her ability to use in a way that continues to help others.

“There are many other Arkansans with disabilities who, like Missy, have the ability to contribute to the workplace and lead productive lives,” Department of Workforce Education Director John C. Wyvill says. “They just need the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and put their knowledge to use.

“That is the message we hope to convey by observing ‘Employ People with Disabilities Month’ every October.”